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USDOC FOR HQ/USFCS/USDOC/CS DG ISRAEL HERNANDEZ
SECSTATE FOR MOROCCO DESK OFFICER RANDAL KAILAU
USDOC FOR 3131/USFCS/OIO/RD/ANESA/GLOOSE/GLITMAN/ STAUHIDI, HOLLY
VINEYARD/MAC/ITA/USDOC, MICHELLE ONEILL/OUS/ITA USDOC

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SUBJECT: U.S. COMMERCIAL SERVICE DIRECTOR GENERAL ISRAEL HERNANDEZ
VISITS MOROCCO

11. (U) Summary: Director General and Assistant Secretary for Trade Promotion Israel Hernandez visited Morocco December 5-7 to reinforce the important friendship and bilateral trade relationship between the U.S. and Morocco. He met separately with Minister of Industry, Commerce and New Technologies Ahmed Chami, Customs Director General Abdellatif Zaghoun, and Minister of Foreign Trade Abdellatif Mazouz. He also held several press interviews with local and regional media, including a live interview with Al Jazeera, which reaches an average of 40 million viewers around the world; the interviews were also covered by the local broadcast and print press. The Director General was accompanied by Special Assistant Aamir Hanif. End Summary.

12. (SBU) During his meeting with Ahmed Chami, Minister of Industry, Commerce and New Technologies, the Director General highlighted his belief that the dynamic change that is transforming Morocco is creating opportunities for international business and investment. Minister Chami agreed, adding that future change in Morocco will be even more dramatic in the coming years due to Morocco's adherence to open markets and major reforms. DG Hernandez referred to the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement as the foundation and platform for growth, and that the primary purpose of his visit was to support this key bilateral agreement. Further discussion focused on education and the need to raise the literacy rate in Morocco, on building investment, and engaging more small and medium sized enterprises. The Minister added that the new Tangier Med port, which is planned to become the largest port in the Mediterranean, will contribute to an expansion of trade, with the goal of Morocco becoming a world transshipment hub similar to Singapore. DG Hernandez reminded the Minister of the upcoming trade and investment conference that will be co-chaired by the Secretary of Commerce in 12008.

13. (SBU) Minister Chami suggested that the U.S. should continue building its image in the Middle East and North Africa region, while continuing to advance the peace process in the Middle East. DG Hernandez responded that the Annapolis conference was a very positive step and mentioned that the President was planning a visit to the Middle East in the near future.

14. (U) In his meeting with DG Hernandez, the Director General of Moroccan Customs, Abdellatif Zaghoun, highlighted his agency's extensive efforts to ensure smooth processing of legal goods through Moroccan borders, enforcement of safety and security of commerce, and his agency's efforts to fight smuggling. DG Zaghoun noted numerous measures already taken and underscored the important contribution of U.S. customs training in the development of Moroccan customs' expertise. DG Zaghoun welcomed continued U.S.-Moroccan customs collaboration and solicited information on any new technologies available that might support Moroccan efforts.

15. (U) A live interview on Al Jazeera's Rabat-based Maghreb news bulletin (broadcast daily at 2200 GMT) was the highlight of numerous outreach events. DG Hernandez also conducted interviews that were broadcast by SNRT television -- Morocco's most-watched local television station -- during its prime-time Arabic-language news broadcast, as well as by SNRT's radio affiliate. Three local newspapers, including the largest circulation French-language daily, also printed excerpts of their interviews with DG Hernandez. During these interviews, DG Hernandez underscored the excellent relationship between the U.S. and Morocco, while emphasizing opportunities for increased bilateral trade and investment, and expressing support for Moroccan reform efforts.

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